



SUB-COMMITTEE ON SAFETY OF  
NAVIGATION -  
45th session  
Agenda item 13

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## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

### IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCPs)

#### Note by the Secretariat

#### SUMMARY

<i>Executive summary:</i>	This document provides guidance for the work of NAV 45 with regard to the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCPs)
<i>Action to be taken:</i>	Paragraph 7.
<i>Related documents:</i>	MSC/Circ.794, MSC 71/23, paragraphs 20.29 and 20.33.

#### Background

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its sixty-eighth session (28 May to 6 June 1997), considered draft "Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCPs)" prepared by the Sub-Committee on Safety of Navigation and approved their dissemination by MSC/Circ.794. MSC 68 also invited Member Governments and international organizations concerned to conduct trials using the SMCPs and to report the results of such trials well in advance for consideration by NAV 45, in order that it could, in co-operation with the COMSAR and STW Sub-Committees, finalize the SMCPs.

2 MSC 68 also considered that, following this, a suitable draft Assembly resolution could be prepared for submission to the twenty-second session of the Assembly for adoption.

3 MSC 71 instructed NAV 45 to include, in the provisional agenda for NAV 46, an item on "IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases".

4 Accordingly, NAV 45 is expected to give initial consideration to the results of the trials on the basis of information thus far received by the Secretariat.

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**Report on Trials results**

5 The Secretariat has received comments on the trials carried out by the following Member Governments:

- .1 Chile;
- .2 Croatia;
- .3 Germany
- .4 Iceland;
- .5 Italy; and
- .6 Ukraine.

and the following Associate Member of IMO:

- .7 Hong Kong, China

and a non-governmental organization in consultative status:

- .8 International Shipping Federation (ISF)

6 These comments are summarized at annex.

**Action requested of the Sub-Committee**

7 The Sub-Committee is invited to give initial consideration to the issue of SMCPs and provide appropriate input to STW 31 and COMSAR 5.

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## ANNEX

### Comments by Chile

Chile's Maritime Administration has reviewed the draft "Standard Marine Communication Phrases", and considers them a useful supplementary tool for communication, reflecting the activity involved in an appropriate fashion, and extremely practical for use in the mobile maritime service.

The draft has been distributed to Chilean merchant ships to be used in navigation and in port duties and manoeuvres, and to other maritime bodies, and has received positive assessment. Some ships have said that they are keeping it for consultation on the bridge because of its helpfulness.

It is suggested that on page 12, paragraphs 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3, the form of pronunciation established by articles 39 and 40 of the Radio Regulations of the International Telecommunication Union should be included.

### Comments by Croatia

The English language departments in MET (Maritime Education and Training) institutions in Croatia received the first official copy of IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCPs 1997) at the IMLA (International Maritime Lecturers Association) WOME (Workshop on Maritime English) Workshop held in June 1997. The copy was disseminated to other colleagues in the English language departments throughout Croatia.

SMCP 1997, which is a continuation and an upgrading on SMNV 1977 and the amended version in 1985, has therefore been made familiar to all MET establishments in Croatia, in particular the nautical colleges in Rijeka, Split and Dubrovnik, as well as a number of nautical schools in secondary school education. Parts of SMCP, particularly those that differ from SMNV or those that have been added (e.g. passenger communication) have been taught and practised with the students in addition to regular study and testing of communications required under SMNV in the above MET establishments.

SMNV 1985 has been translated into Croatian and a publication with the English and Croatian texts running parallel was published by the major educational publishing company in 1987. The translation of SMCP is now under way.

Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Transport and Communications has recommended SMCPs to MET institutions for insertion in the syllabus and teaching programmes. Thus, SMCP has been included in the syllabuses for the courses and exams to obtain certificates under STCW Convention, as amended.

Since SMCP is primarily a handbook of a reference character, the Republic of Croatia considers that there is an urgent need for the elaboration of an internationally acceptable course book which should take into consideration the differences of SMCP language standards and the forms of language used in real spoken and written maritime communications. Preferably, this course book could be an extended or improved version of Seaspeak (it was fully recognised as an aid to maritime communication as well as a valuable aid in teaching in nautical establishments during the twentieth session of STW Sub-Committee), taking into account modern requirements in English language teaching (ELT) and in the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially to non-native speakers of English.

In addition to the appropriate measures taken in MET institutions, the Government of the Republic of Croatia is now taking steps to introduce SMCP for recommended use on board ships and by SAR organisations, VTS services, pilots and port authorities, etc. The Government will also monitor the application and use of SMCP in the MET institutions and in the use of the same in real maritime communications on board Croatian ships and within the waters under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Croatia. Relevant reports will be made periodically and submitted to IMO.

### **Comments by Germany**

The IMO-SMCP are generally appreciated as a valuable means for the further improvement of the safety-related verbal communication as required by STCW 95.

Regarding ship-to-shore communications VTS Authorities stated that the IMO-SMCP will altogether considerably facilitate verbal VTS communications if all parties involved, i.e. shore and ship, will observe the Phrases. However, an insufficient command even of the fundamentals of the English language frequently makes the application of the IMO-SMCP a problem, and the efficient use of the Phrases will decisively depend on the improvement of standards of maritime English that might be expected in the course of implementation of the corresponding requirements set by STCW 95. VTS Authorities furthermore suggest standardized qualification courses for VTS personnel with final tests on the use of the IMO-SMCP to be held in all coastal states concerned. They also submitted a detailed proposal on how to reasonably reduce the total number of VTS Phrases.

German MET institutions such as the Departments of Maritime Studies at Universities, SAR and VTS training institutions, Water Police Academies, etc. have already incorporated the IMO-SMCP into their teaching programmes since they do not expect drastic changes to occur in the finalized version of the same. Maritime English lecturers first of all welcome the creation of the Phrases as one practicable aid for the development of basic safety-related maritime English skills among maritime personnel. The corresponding instruction is or will be based on the practice of seafaring and realized through all the various modern language teaching methods and tools; first training results are said to be very promising. As far as the education of nautical students at universities and colleges is concerned it should be stated, that the IMO-SMCP are not regarded as a full and complete syllabus for maritime English rather than an indispensable and essential part of the curriculum which needs enrichment by further items not covered or intended by the Phrases. Instructors of maritime English should be familiarized in special regional seminars with the IMO-SMCP and the appropriate teaching strategies and approaches to be applied. An IMO publication of a Teacher's Manual and a voice-recorded version of the Phrases would be highly appreciated.

A new and more detailed introduction to the IMO-SMCP should provide exact information as regards their communicative principles, their aims as well as their status and function in maritime communications in order to a priori avoid any misconception regarding their objectives.

A number of triallists recommended a considerable reduction of the total number of Phrases. If IMO deems this necessary, it should be done very carefully in order not to damage the communicative intention of the IMO-SMCP as a whole. Disregarding the number of Phrases the finalized version is going to comprise, they will never been taught completely but always selectively according to the needs of the users, i.e. VTS Operators would restrict to the limited number of Phrases applicable to their area of responsibility and so would SAR personnel, Pilots and others. A reduction of Phrases should not considerably confine the choice a prospective user or group of users might take.

Finally, all the experimental users would appreciate the IMO-SMCP to be adopted by the Organization at its earliest convenience.

### Comments by Iceland

Iceland proposes the following changes to the SMCPs in the form of new glossary items and some remarks on the text in general.

## PART I – GENERAL

### Paragraph 16 Time

directly following zone time insert (ZT)

directly following local mean time insert (LMT)

## PART II – GLOSSARY

Area to be Avoided	A routeing measure comprising an area within defined limits in which either navigation is particularly hazardous or it is exceptionally important to avoid casualties and which should be avoided by all ships, or certain classes of ships.
Air draft	Height if the highest point of the vessel above sea surface (see p.24)
All-round light	A light showing an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of 360 degrees.
Cable	1) 0.1 nautical mile (br. 185.2m); 1/10 of a nautical mile (am. 219.5m). 2) anchor chain (see p. 75 point IV-A/5.5.1.9)
Constrained	Vessel constrained by her draught is a power-driven vessel, which because of her draught in relation to the available depth is restricted in her ability to manoeuvre.
Deep-water route	A route within defined limits, which has been accurately surveyed for clearance of sea bottom and submerged obstacles as indicated on the chart.
Draught	Draft; the depth of water which a ship draws.
DSC	Digital Selective Calling
EPIRB	Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon
Flashing light	A light flashing at regular intervals at a frequency at 120 flashes or more per minute.
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IMDG	International Dangerous Goods Code.
Icing	Over-icing; marine icing; ice accretion – coating of ice on a solid object.
ITZ	Inshore Traffic Zone
Lane	One-way sailing route in TSS
Leeward	Opposite to windward – the lee side; the point or quarter toward which the wind blows.
Lateral marks	Red and green seamarks (buoys)
LORAN	Long Range navigation System
Masthead light	A white light placed over the fore and aft centreline of the vessel.
MMSI	Maritime Mobile Service Identity Code (see p.122)

MRCC	Maritime rescue Co-ordination Centre – Centre for administration of SAR Operations.
Muster list	list of crew, passengers and all aboard and their function in a distress situation.
NAVTEX	Navigational telex.
Off-shore Installation Oil platform Over-icing Precautionary Area	Icing; marine icing; ice accretion – coating of ice on a solid object.  Routing measure comprising an area within defined limits where ships must navigate with particular caution and within the direction of traffic flow may be recommended.
Restricted visibility Restricted to manoeuvre	Any condition in which visibility is restricted.  A vessel which from the nature of her work is restricted in her ability to manoeuvre is required.
Restricted waters Roundabout	Fairway, a narrow channel, port. See Definitions 2.1.6 in Ships' Routing, sixth edition 1991 General Provisions p.4.
Routing System	See Definitions 2.1.1 in Ships' Routing, sixth edition 1991 General Provisions p.4.
Sidelights	a green light on the starboard side of a vessel and a red light on the port side.
Superbuoy Sternlight	A white light placed as nearly as practicable at the stern of a vessel.
TCPA	Time Closest Point of Approach
TEU	Twenty Equivalent Units (see p. 105 point 1.1.1.5.1)
Towing light	a yellow light...
TSS	Traffic Separation Schemes.
VHF	Very High Frequency

### **PART III EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION PHRASES**

p.26  
III / 1.1.1.6.3, 1.1.1.6.4 and 1.1.1.6.5 In stead of I am not ... - My vessel is .../ my ship is

p.27  
III / 1.1.2.1 In stead of I have... - My vessel has.../ my ship has...  
1.1.2.2 In stead of I am... - My vessel is.../ my ship is...

p.33  
III / 1.3 In stead of Person overboard – Man overboard (cf. MOB)

p.38  
III / 3.2.3 Insert new item: DGPS ...

p.44 III / 5.2.1	Correction: In stead of I am fast on ice – My vessel is fast in ice / My ship is fast in ice.
p.54 III / 6.2.1.6.1	Insert new item: DGPS...
p.56 III / 6.2.2.1	Insert new item: Position obtained by LORAN
p.68 IV-A/ 3.3	Briefing on navigational aids and equipment status
Insert new item:	DGPS in operation DGPS not in operation
p.75	
Insert reference after:	
IV-A/ 5.4	Draft and air draft – see p.24
IV-A/ 5.5	Anchoring – see p.25
IV-A/ 5.5.2	Leaving the anchorage – see p. 25
IV-A/ 5.6	Tug assistance – see p.25
p.101 IV-B/ 6.2	Instead of Person-overboard activities – Man overboard activities (man overboard occurs several times in IV-B/ 6.2.)
p.118 IV-D/ 1.2.4	Instead of Person-overboard – Man overboard (MOB)

### Comments by Italy

From March 15 to 19, 1999, a group of 15 Coast Guard Officers and Petty Officers of the Capitaneria di Porto di Trieste participated in an intensive Maritime English course of 30 hours organized by the IMO-IMA in Trieste.

This course was exclusively devoted to the training of the SMCP in routine VHF communication, VTS communication, SAR and Distress/Urgency/Safety communication. That means, maritime English requirements were met which our Officers in their services have to be increasingly prepared to.

We can state that the participants consider the SMCP to be of great value for training of non-native English speaking maritime personnel since they provide a useful minimum communication device. Teaching the SMCP was very interesting as well because it had been done by means of a methodically well thought-out instrumentatium using audio cassettes, various handouts, transparencies, etc. However, the corresponding Drafting Group on the SMCP would probably be well advised to find ways of reasonably reducing the total amount of phrases.

## Comments by Ukraine

Taking into consideration that special maritime English is part of safety on board especially in emergency situations when language accuracy is critical. It has been given additional emphasis by the ISM Code and the revised STCW Convention.

Being a non-English speaking country Ukraine whole-heartedly supports the new IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) which have been developed in response to the need for improved standard of communication at sea and which reflect many changes in the maritime industry since the production of the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary.

We especially welcome the inclusion of chapters dealing with cargo handling procedure and passenger care.

In accordance with MSC/Circ. 794 we have started conducting trials in the use of SMCP and though the work is still in progress we would like to make some comments on the results of their experimental use.

- .1 Grammar forms are not always reduced to a tolerable minimum which affects basic skills and understanding:
- e.g. III/ 1.2  
1.2.1  
2. I proceed to your assistance
- III/ 1.3  
4. I am proceeding for assistance  
5. Aircraft arriving within .... hours to assist in search.

Three different forms are used to express Present Progressive

We suggest: I (am) proceeding to your assistance  
I (am) proceeding for assistance  
Aircraft (is) arriving within .... hours

.2 SMCP should be regarded as a reference book and its structure should consolidate the material to that point to avoid unnecessary repetition and facilitate finding the appropriate material without delay.

However titles of some sub-parts do not reveal their contents, while some important parts are just outlined without giving any details:

- e.g. III/ 2  
1.1.1. Engine and equipment
- III/ 6.2  
6.2.1.4. Routeing information



.3 overuse of prepositions:

e.g. IV A/3.1.  
3.1.2

We suggest: 4 speed over ground  
speed over water  
ground speed  
water speed

.4 overuse of modal verbs:

e.g. IV A/3.2  
5.1 We need not give way  
We suggest: We must not give way

### Comments by Hong Kong, China

In Hong Kong, China separate trials were conducted by the Vessel Traffic Centre (VTC) and the Marine Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) to evaluate the practical use of SMCP in their respective operations. A full report on the methodology adopted and findings arrived at has been submitted to the IMO Secretariat. Following is a summary of the conclusions drawn from the trials.

#### *In respect of Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) operations*

.1 While the SMCP provides a useful reference for general maritime communications, it is impractical to rely on a standard set of phrases to cover each and every aspect of the information to be exchanged since there are so many variables in the VTS operations. This is particularly so in the Hong Kong, China situation.

.2 Given the scope and volume of the SMCP, extensive training is required to ensure that the operators are fully conversant with the phrases and therefore can effectively apply these in their daily operations.

.3 There appears to be a strong correlation between a person's language proficiency and his ability to effectively communicate by using the SMCP. Unlike using the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary (SMNV), most ship officers from non-English speaking countries had difficulty in understanding or using the SMCP.

**Note:** The SMNV is routinely used in the VTS communications since the inception of VTC in 1989, which is simple and easy to understand. There is no apparent difficulty for both the VTS staff and port users to communicate using the SMNV.

.4 Unless the users were fully conversant with the language, the communication in SMCP would be less efficient due to the need to repeat or explain the messages.

*In respect of Search and Rescue operations*

- .5 The SMCP for search and rescue operations are relatively easy to understand. Provided that sufficient training is given to the operators and shipboard personnel, the use of SMCP in search and rescue operations should help improve the communication.
- .6 There was no significant difference in the air time spent in the communication whether using the SMCP or plain language.
- .7 Given that all participants in the trials are comparatively more educated and fully qualified, the practicability and effectiveness of using the SMCP for SAR communication with the those less proficient in the language, for example the local fishermen or mariners from non-English speaking countries, is yet to be tested.

**Comments by ISF**

The draft SMCP should be restructured so that there is a clear distinction (i.e. entirely separate Sections) between vocabulary to be used for external communications and those phrases which may be useful for internal communication between seafarers (and with passengers) on board.

Table II/1 of the STCW Code requires that deck officers should have “the ability to use and understand the Standard Marine Navigation Vocabulary as replaced by the Standard Marine Communication Phrases”. It should be therefore be made clear in the foreword to the SMCP that the references in STCW 95 only refer to those sections which revise the SMNV (i.e. the sections relevant to external communications).

The draft SMCP should be made considerably shorter.

The introduction to the SMCP should make it clear that the phrases that may be useful for internal communication on board ship have been drafted as additional material to which English language teachers may refer, but which seafarers are not actually expected to learn on a phrase by phrase basis.

That the entire SMCP be subjected to a detailed review on a line by line basis – perhaps during a meeting of a Working Group that coincides with an IMO Sub-Committee meeting – so that all inappropriate use of English can be corrected.

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